

## **Tunneling Through Towns**

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Existing as a series of complex tunnels stretching over 109 miles beneath many Chicago suburbs, the Deep Tunnel Project is an important part of several communities' history and their future. Designed in the 1970s as a plan to solve the problem of flooding and water pollution in the Chicagoland area, the Deep Tunnel was selected as the most effective way to control the crisis. Under the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan, or TARP, over one hundred miles of huge underground tunnels were dug beneath the suburbs to hold excess amounts of sewer overflow and eventually carry it to reservoirs where it would be processed. In northern Illinois, 52 connected sewer systems were built. Because of the multiple systems being connected, billions of gallons of water, sewage, and a mixture of dirt compete to be purified at the same time and at the same place, the sewer treatment plants. When a big storm rushes through, dumping over 5 billion gallons of low quality water on the Chicagoland area, which has treatment centers that can only process two billion gallons a day, the demand is great. This excess water ends up flooding basements, streets, or eventually going straight into Lake Michigan, further polluting the area's drinking water. One can see the need for this huge span of tunnels. Without the project, the Chicagoland area would be full of sick people, and the residents would often be flooded.

How many billions of gallons of water can Chicago store? With the addition of the new reservoir systems—one already completed near O'Hare and two in construction in Thornton and the McCook areas—will add 15.6 billion gallons of storage in addition to the billions that the tunnels can hold. This will help flooding in the areas, stop some of the pollution of Lake Michigan, and ultimately improve the sewer problem faced by northeastern Illinois. However, with sewage being stored in areas near people's homes, what affect will the reservoirs have on their surrounding areas?

The Thornton Quarry, formerly the world's largest limestone quarry, will become the home for one such reservoir. The northern lobe, which stretches across 35 acres, was taken by a court order from Material Services Corporation for flood control. However, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District is working on expanding the area, and by doing so, forcing a decrease in the size of the Thornton Industrial District. By doing so, the village of Thornton lost tax money paid by these companies, and when the town's average annual budget is only \$1.2 million dollars, that does some damage to the town's economy. Furthermore, the smell of decaying sewage in the nearby quarry may drive some businesses away, not to mention everyday citizens.

The Deep Tunnel Project is a valuable plan that has contributed to the success of Chicagoland, and its suburbs. Without the smell of sewage and with dry roads, the Northeastern Chicagoland area was able to grow. However, with such success on a wide scale, people forget about the problems it has caused. As much as the tunnel is a part of Chicagoland's history, it also serves as a foundation for what is to happen in the future. Maybe a further solution is needed to rid the towns of the effects of storing sewage in the suburbs. [The Village of Thornton, "North Lobe Quarry Project,"

[www.thornton60476.com/deep\\_tunnel.htm](http://www.thornton60476.com/deep_tunnel.htm), (May 21, 2002); The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, <http://www.mwrdgc.dst.il.us/>, (May 22, 2002); South Holland Illinois, "Deep Tunnel Flood Relief Program," <http://www.southholland.org/Tunnel.htm>, (May 19, 2002).]